

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VDH 06-21

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PARTNERS WITH BARBERS
TO REDUCE RISKS OF ORAL CANCER**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is enlisting the aid of barbers in the Richmond area to help reduce the risk of oral cancer among their African-American customers.

“Barbers have the potential for being excellent health ambassadors,” said Tonya McRae, adult oral health coordinator at VDH. “The relationship barbers often build with their customers could help communicate important health information, including the importance of getting screened for oral cancer.”

Staff from VDH’s Division of Dental Health and the American Cancer Society will conduct a workshop Monday, April 24, to train barbers and stylists to become health ambassadors. Anyone planning to attend must pre-register by Friday, April 21 by calling Tonya McRae, adult oral health coordinator at (804) 864-7785. The event will be held at the Imani Conference Center, 1506 Hull Street, from 10 a.m. until 1:45 p.m.

Participants will learn the risk factors associated with oral cancer and the importance of monthly self-exams and yearly examinations by a physician or dentist. Those attending will receive lunch and \$50 for attending the training session. They also will be eligible for prizes for referring clients to screening centers set up at health fairs, community health centers and free clinics. To help educate their clients about oral cancer, participants will be given tip cards, brochures and posters to display in their shops.

VDH data indicate that black men are twice as likely to die from oral cancer as white men. Reasons for this health disparity include lack of knowledge about oral cancer and limited access to screenings. Only 36 percent of oral cancers in Virginia are diagnosed in their earliest stages when they are easier to treat. Oral cancer is the seventh most common cancer in men in Virginia. According to the National Cancer Institute, only half of those with oral cancer survive.

“People need to know about the risk of oral cancer and learn what steps they can take to prevent it,” said McRae. The signs of oral cancer include:

- A sore or lump on the lip, mouth or throat that does not heal.
- A white or red patch on the gums, tongue or lining of the mouth.
- Unusual bleeding, pain or numbness in the mouth.
- A sore throat that does not go away or feeling something is caught in the throat.
- Difficulty or pain chewing or swallowing.
- Persistent cough or hoarseness.
- Moles that change in color or size.

(more)

The following steps help lower your risk of oral cancer:

- Avoid tobacco.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation.
- Use lip balm with sun screen of at least SPF 15 when in the sun.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

To learn more about VDH's oral health programs, visit www.vahealth.org/teeth.

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